

# Downing College, Regent Street, Cambridge

An Archaeological Evaluation



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**CAMBRIDGE  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**



**UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE**

**Downing College, Regent Street, Cambridge**  
**An archaeological evaluation**

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*Between 8-9<sup>th</sup> April 2014 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Downing College, Cambridge in advance of the redevelopment of part of the Maintenance Yard. Two 6m long northeast-southwest trenches were dug approximately 5m apart beneath the existing car park as part of an attempt to locate a possible Roman road believed to lie somewhere within this area on the south side of Regent Street. No archaeology was encountered within the easternmost Trench 1, although the underlying marly sand and gravel was reached at a depth of about 1.45m, but in Trench 2 a single shallow NNE-SSW ditch dating most probably to the early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century was encountered. From this an assortment of late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century ceramics, bottle glass, tile and brick were recovered. The ditch was sealed by a 19<sup>th</sup> century garden soil and also cut by an old tree bole which pre-dated all the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century redevelopment in this area. No trace of the projected road, or for that matter any trace of Roman pottery was found during the evaluation of this site.*

## **Introduction**

This archaeological investigation was commissioned by Downing College, Cambridge at the request of the Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team (CHET) (McConnell 2014) in advance of the redevelopment of part of the college Maintenance Yard and the construction of a single storey maintenance building and workshop (NGR TL 4537 5793).

### *Geology and topography*

The underlying geology here consists of the Second Terrace Sand and Gravel overlying the Gault Clay. The local topography is flat at c. 12m AOD, the site lying at the junction of the urban development of Regent Street, the buildings of Downing College, and the parkland of the Master's Garden.

### *Archaeological background*

Little is known of the specific archaeology of the immediate area surrounding this site.

#### Roman

The site lies close to the projected line of the Roman road entering Cambridge from the south. This was observed “3 to four yards from Hills Road” during trenching carried out in the Botanic Garden around 1883, some 1500m to the south of the current site [CHER 04614].

#### Medieval

Medieval pottery was found in Regent Street near to the entrance of Downing College during trench digging at an unknown date [CHER 04554]. Dawe's Cross stood at the junction of Deepway (now Lensfield Road) and Hadstock Road (now Hills Road). The cross is frequently mentioned in Field Books and Terriers [CHER 04078]. Probable Medieval ridge and furrow has been recorded on Parker's Piece to the east of the College [CHER 10102]. Medieval town settlement was encountered to the north-west of Downing College along the south side of St. Andrew's Street during excavations carried out prior to the construction of the Grand Arcade shopping centre (Cessford 2007). This continued on the north side of St. Andrew's Street under Bradwell Court (Newman 2007).

#### Postmedieval

Downing College [CHER 04859] was founded by the will of Sir George Downing who died in 1749, but the granting of the charter was delayed by litigation until 1800. The building was begun in 1807 to the designs of William Wilkins, on a ‘campus’ type plan, the earliest example known. The design was never completed as originally envisaged, but the ranges were completed by E.H. Barry in 1874-1876. The north side of the quadrangle was begun in 1930 and completed in 1953, but the south side remains open. The College is Grade I listed.

## Methodology

The two trenches were stripped using a 360° machine with a 1.8m wide ditching bucket. Piles of topsoil/made-up ground and subsoil were dumped separately either side of each trench, each of these trenches being dug down to the level of the top of the natural (sands and gravel), or to a maximum safe working depth of 1.2m. Baulks were left around previously determined live services, whilst in the deepest trench (Trench 1) the natural was only reached within a testpit or sounding. Sample sections within the two trenches were drawn and recorded (1:10), whilst a plan (at 1:50 scale) was made of Trench 2 which contained archaeology. This archaeology was sampled in a 1m-wide slot and a section of this drawn at 1:10. Finds were recovered and bagged, and the trench sections digitally photographed. In addition to this, the subsoil layers from the digging of each trench was bucket sampled for finds.

## Results

In total an area of 21.6m<sup>2</sup> was excavated within these two trenches. This included an off-set to Trench 2 (see Figure 2) which was dug in addition to the main NE-SW trench in order to try and establish the western edge of feature F.1. The location of an old tree bole (F.2) was also recorded as this provided a useful relative dating sequence for the archaeology.

### Trench 1

0 - 1m modern rubble-filled NW-SE cut for electric cable; 1 – 2.5m testpit sounding (0.4m deep) to top of hard yellow-white coloured marl-concreted natural (sand); 2 - 5m yellowish – olive-green/grey coloured silty sandy lower subsoil containing occasional flint gravel/ pebbles and ecofacts (weathered animal bone and oyster shell).

Trench section:

*Recorded 1.5-2m from NE end*

(001) 0-0.2.9m modern rubble/ demolition layer

(002) 0.29-0.37m soft dark brown/black silt with heavy rooting and frequent small gravel inclusions

(003) 0.37-0.75m moderate soft dark brown silt with rare medium to small gravel inclusions

(004) 0.75-1.07m moderate soft light grey-brown silty sand with moderate small gravel inclusions

(005) 1.07-1.21m soft light orange silty sand with mod pale yellow sand patches and rare round stones

(006) 1.21-1.49m soft orange-brown sand with rare small stone inclusions

NB oyster shell and animal (rib) bone recovered from subsoil (003)

### Trench 2

0 - 1m redeposited orange sand and sandstone; 1- 1.5m rubble-filled cut for electric services; 1.5- 3m slope battered section of subsoil; 3- 7m purple-red-brown sand with angular gravel (natural) cut by NNE-SSW oriented 0.7m wide grey silt and flint gravel-filled (12) ditch cut (F.1 and by a dark humic soil-filled tree throw (F.2)

Trench section:

*Recorded 5-6.5m from NE end*

(007) 0-0.45m modern rubble/ demolition layer: compacted flint gravel (0-0.1m), orange sand (0.05m), limestone ballast stone (0.1m), loose tarmac (0.05m), dark topsoil/sand/brick rubble mix (0.15m)

## **F.2**

(008) 0.45-0.98m mixed topsoil disturbance with old rooting (humic), sand, flint gravel and brick rubble (= upper fill of tree throw)

(009) 0.98 – 1.3m a dark grey-black humic silt with woody inclusions (= lower fill of tree throw)  
[15] cut of tree throw

(010) 0.45 – 0.79m a light brown-yellow to olive-green compact sandy subsoil with occ gravel

(011) 0.79 – 1.1m a loose dark grey humic silt with much gravel and occasional inclusions of flower pot, brick, glass and coal

## **F.1**

(012) 1.1 – 1.49m a compact olive-green to yellow-brown silty sand becoming more gravelly and sandy yellow towards base, but with pottery, coal and brick throughout

[014] cut of rubble + rubbish filled NNE-SSW linear; 0.7m wide and 0.25m deep

## *Finds*

A total of 234g of ceramic and other finds were also collected from a 1m slot through the fill (012) of ditch F.1.

### **Brick (200g)**

A mixture of small fragments of hand-made soft red brick (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century AD?) and harder yellow brick (19<sup>th</sup> century?) was recovered from F.1 context (012) (ditch fill).

### **Tile (286g)**

Fragments of hand-made yellow roofing tiles (probably early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century) were recovered from this same fill F.1 (012).

### **Animal bone and oyster shell (68g)**

Butchered fragments of animal bone (sheep and cattle) plus some oyster shell were recovered from F.1 (012).

### **Burnt stone and flint (396g)**

Some burnt sandstone slab and a small amount of burnt flint was recovered (012).

## **Pottery, glass and clay tobacco pipe**

*Andy Hall*

This mixed group of Post-medieval ceramics ranged in date from the later 17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Included within this assemblage were sherds from a large buff fabric straight-sided unglazed storage of the 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a fragment of late 17<sup>th</sup> century Staffordshire slipwear, the base from a late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> century pearlware tankard, and a sherd from a transfer decorated slops bowl of around 1820. Accompanying this were the indented bases of two wine bottles dating the early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, plus three small and undateable fragments from the stems of clay tobacco pipes.

The association of finds from ditch F.1 suggests a date for the digging/ backfill of this ditch of around the early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (i.e. pre-Victorian).

## **Discussion and conclusions**

No trace of the Roman road was encountered within the small evaluation trenches dug at this south-eastern corner of the Downing College site just 20m back from the south side of Regent Street (i.e. to the rear of no.76 Regent Street). Likewise there was no evidence (in the form of re-deposited pottery etc.) for Roman or Medieval occupation nearby. This site lies outside the area of Medieval Cambridge, and there are clear indications also that this area was built on at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this accompanying the foundation and laying out of Downing College, and also the building of the Late Georgian tenement houses along the adjacent road frontage. The thick development of a subsoil and buried agricultural soil within the trenched area suggests that this location was relatively empty and therefore undeveloped prior to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The pottery assemblage was recovered from what now appears to be a narrow shallow late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century property boundary (ditch) which seems to have been oriented at a slight angle to the existing road (quite possibly this relates to the western boundary of the plot located to the rear of no.76 Regent Street?). The presence of at least some earlier pottery (such as the Staffordshire slipware) attests to the probable existence of some 17<sup>th</sup> century occupation somewhere in this area.

During the digging of this ditch the base could not easily be deepened due to the presence of a hard lime-rich concretion. On encountering it at the bottom of the ditch, the edge of this was cut or else levered-off in a line, thus providing a source of confusion as to whether or not this represented the footings for a wall along the boundary. Further sampling confirmed this was not the case.

In conclusion, this property boundary ditch was probably dug at the very beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then was infilled with domestic rubbish and soil following clearance and the laying out of this area as gardens associated with the college. This area seems then to have been cultivated a little, then planted with trees. The pulling down/ felling of these may have taken place sometime during the second half of the twentieth century, following which the area was laid over as a maintenance yard and car park.

## **Acknowledgements**

The work was undertaken for Downing College, Cambridge. Our presence on site was facilitated by Richard Monument (for Downing College). The archaeological investigation was requested by Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET), and the work was monitored by Dan McConnell. Jane Matthews (CAU) digitised the section and produced the graphics for this report. Alison Dickens was CAU Project Manager.

## References

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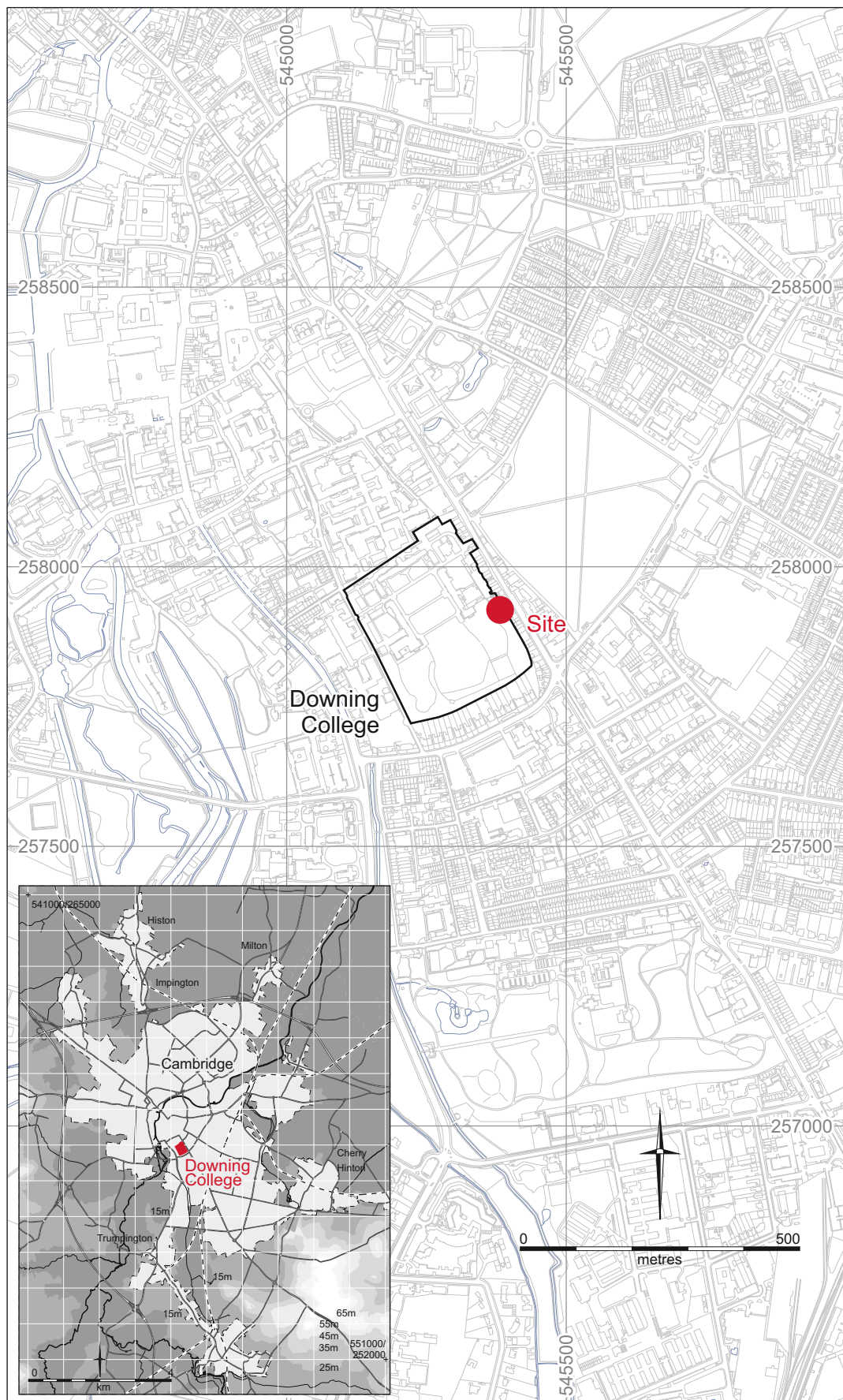


Figure 1. Location of site

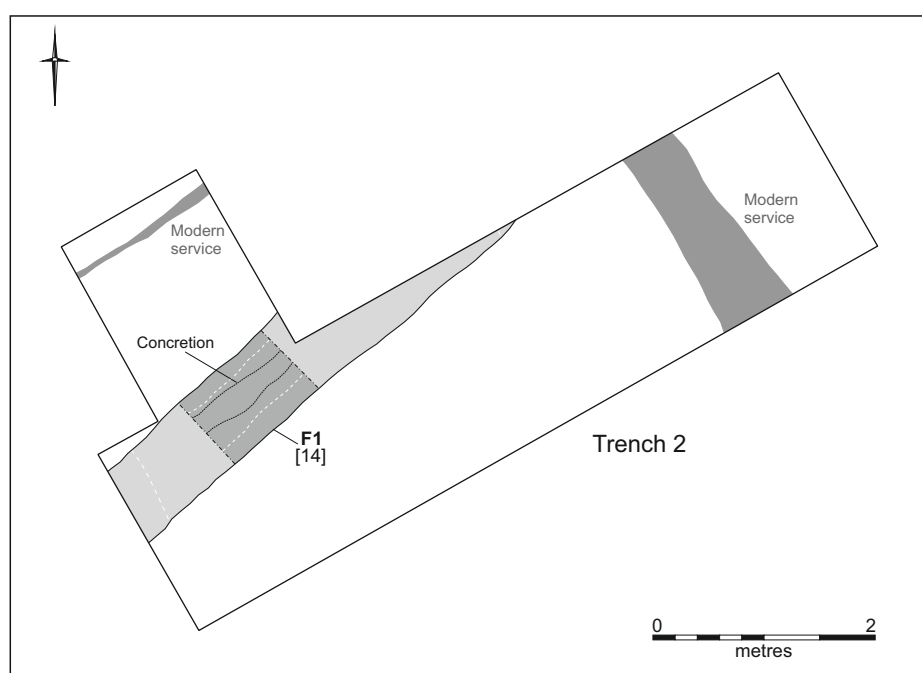
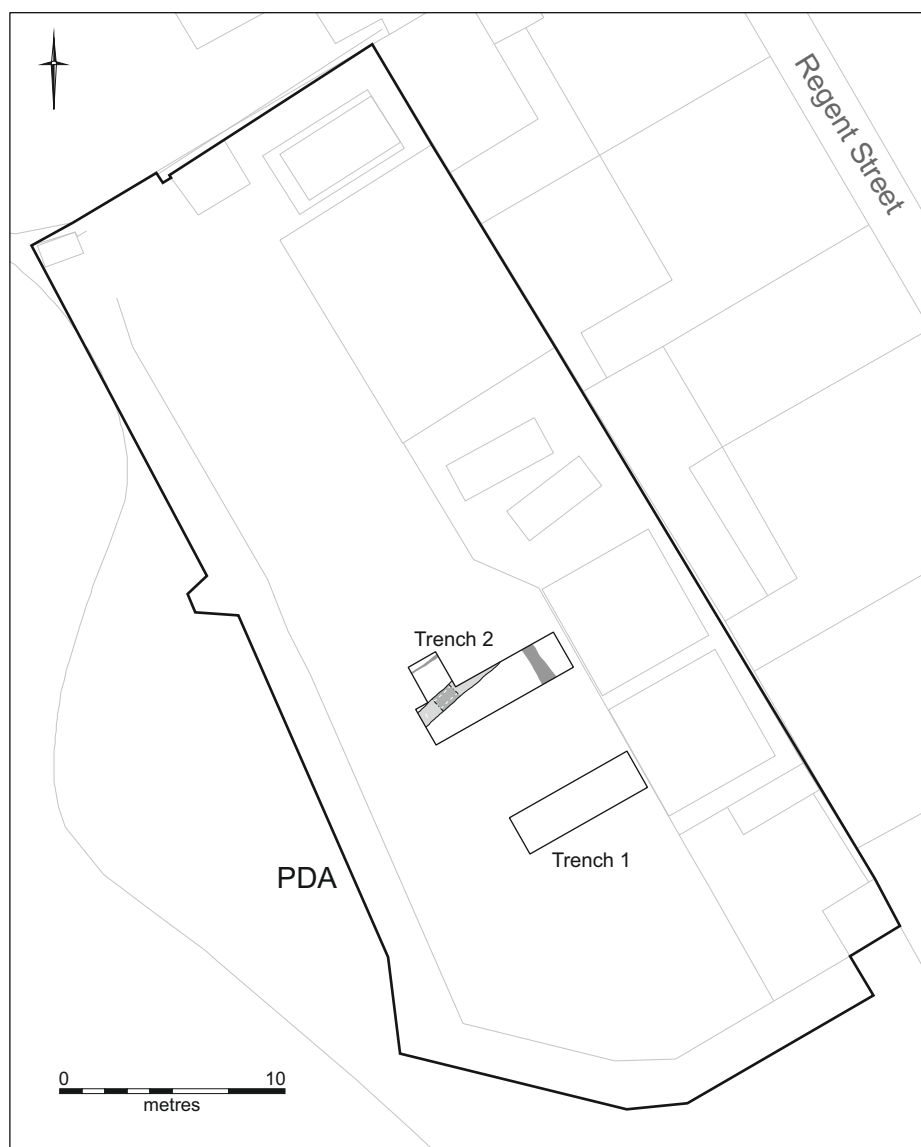


Figure 2. Trench plans





Figure 3. Photographs of Trench 2

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### Project details

Project name	Downing College, Cambridge
Short description of the project	Between 8-9th April 2014 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Downing College, Cambridge in advance of the redevelopment of part of the Maintenance Yard. Two 6m long northeast-southwest trenches were dug approximately 5m apart beneath the existing car park as part of an attempt to locate a possible Roman road believed to lie somewhere within this area on the south side of Regent Street. No archaeology was encountered within the easternmost Trench 1, although the underlying marly sand and gravel was reached at a depth of about 1.45m, but in Trench 2 a single shallow NNE-SSW ditch dating most probably to the early-mid 19th century was encountered. From this an assortment of late 17th to early 19th century ceramics, bottle glass, tile and brick were recovered. The ditch was sealed by a 19th century garden soil and also cut by an old tree bole which pre-dated all the late 20th-century redevelopment in this area. No trace of the projected road, or for that matter any trace of Roman pottery was found during the evaluation of this site.
Project dates	Start: 08-04-2014 End: 09-04-2014
Previous/future work	No / Yes
Any associated project reference codes	DMB14 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	13/1633/FUL - Planning Application No.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Other 15 - Other
Monument type	PROPERTY BOUNDARY DITCH Post Medieval
Significant Finds	17TH C STAFFORDSHIRE SLIPWEAR Post Medieval
Significant Finds	EARLY 19THC POTTERY Post Medieval
Methods & techniques	"Targeted Trenches"
Development type	Estate management (i.e. maintenance of existing structures and landscape by capital works and on-going maintenance)



Prompt Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Position in the planning process After full determination (eg. As a condition)

### Project location

Country England

Site location CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE Downing College, Cambridge

Postcode CB2 1DP

Study area 22.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TL 4536 5790 52.1997222222 0.127222222222 52 11 59 N 000 07 38 E Point

Height OD / Depth Min: 12.00m Max: 12.00m

### Project creators

Name of Organisation Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Project brief originator Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body

Project design originator Alison Dickens

Project director/manager Alison Dickens

Project supervisor Simon Timberlake

Type of sponsor/funding body Developer

Name of sponsor/funding body Downing College, Cambridge

### Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Physical Archive ID DMB14

Physical Contents "Glass","other","Animal Bones","Ceramics"

Digital Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Digital Archive ID DMB14

Digital Contents "Animal Bones","Ceramics","Stratigraphic","Survey"

Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography","Survey"

Paper Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

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Paper Contents "Ceramics","Stratigraphic","Survey"

Paper Media available "Context sheet", "Map", "Photograph", "Plan", "Report", "Section", "Survey "

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